

**The Effect of Greenways on  
Property Values and Public Safety**

**A Joint Study by:  
The Conservation Fund  
and  
Colorado State Parks  
State Trails Program**

**The Conservation Fund  
Sydney Shafroth Macy, Colorado Director  
Leslee T. Alexander, Project Manager**

**Colorado State Parks  
State Trails Program  
Stuart H. Macdonald, Director  
Chris Ford, Greenway Trails Planner  
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## **PURPOSE**

The study of Property Values and Public Safety (herein known as the study) was to determine what effect, if any, the presence of urban trails has had on public safety to property owners who live adjacent to a trail and on property values of homes located within one block of a trail. The study also evaluated the level of public acceptance for urban trails and their effect on the quality of life in these neighborhoods.

The need for the study arose due to concerns expressed by several different neighborhoods over the proposed construction of new trails. These concerns included fears that the presence of an urban trail might lower property values and also create a risk to public safety, thus adversely affecting the quality of life in the neighborhood. These concerns are similar to concerns voiced in the past over proposed trails that are now established and accepted.

## **TRAIL PROFILE**

The metro-Denver area has hundreds of trails which connect together to create an expansive and constantly growing system. Trail users vary from commuter bicyclists to couples taking an evening stroll through the neighborhood. Though many types of trails located in different areas of the city were looked at, only five trails were considered for use in the study: the Franklin Street foot-path, which runs along Franklin Street as it passes through Cherry Hills Village and Greenwood Village; the Highline Canal Trail, located in Aurora; the Lee Gulch Trail in the Windemere neighborhood; the Weir Gulch Trail, located in the Barnum neighborhood of west Denver; and the Willow Creek Trail, located in southeast Denver.

The Franklin Street footpath is a small, infrequently traveled trail. It was difficult to obtain data that was pertinent for use in the study due to its size. The Lee Gulch Trail would have been appropriate for the study, but it was difficult to ascertain whether the individuals interviewed were referring to the Lee Gulch Trail or the southeastern area of Highline Canal Trail, which passes in close proximity.

The trail segments chosen for the study were the Highline Canal Trail, the Weir Gulch Trail, and the Willow Creek Trail. These trails represent the variety of trails in Metro-Denver. Each study area is under two miles long and the composition of the surface of the trails ranges from dirt or crusher-fines to asphalt or concrete. The trails run along natural waterways and are surrounded by a combination of indigenous plants and recent landscaping. Though these trails are located in residential neighborhoods, they also cross busy intersections and pass through commercial and retail areas.

For residents of single family homes adjacent to a trail, 29% believed that the location of the trail would increase the selling price of their home. 7% of the residents felt that the trail would make the home easier to sell. 57% of these residents also had lived in their homes prior to construction of the trail, yet 29% of those surveyed were positively influenced by the trail in their decision to buy the home.

None of the residents of townhomes, apartments, and condominiums adjacent to a trail thought the trail would decrease the selling price of their home, and 42% thought that it would increase the selling price of their home. 755 of the residents lived in the area prior to the construction of the trail, and 17% were influenced by the trail to move to the area.

In regard to public safety, only one resident was concerned with their situation. They lived on the connection of a trail to a park and had experienced some vandalism and damage to their property. As a result, they chose to put up more lights around their house in an attempt to ward off trespassers. This effort proved successful and, despite the annoyance, they felt that the trail increased their quality of life. The patrol officers did not have concerns for public safety along the trails when the trails were used during regular daylight hours.

No public safety issues could be directly linked to the trail. The most serious issues of late have been graffiti and tagging at underpasses. None of these incidents were focused towards other trail users and usually occurred when there were no other people on or around the trail. The officers doubted there would be a concern for public safety due to the constant passage of people on the trails. It was also mentioned that people rely on their automobiles, and would be more likely to congregate in a parking lot.

In summary, concerns that urban trails might adversely effect public safety and property value in surrounding neighborhoods are not substantiated by the results of this study. The effect of a trail on the neighboring property is beneficial, rather than detrimental. The general opinion is that trails are an amenity to the neighborhoods around them; they increase the desirability of property and provide a space for young children and adults of all ages to run and play.

One point of concern regarding trails should be mentioned. Though the general opinion is that trails are an amenity, almost half of the people interviewed either did not use the trail discussed, or were not aware of its existence. It appears that greater community involvement should be recruited for future trails to truly be an useful aspect of a neighborhood.